UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CN.17/1995/L.8
25 April 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Third session
11-28 April 1995
Agenda item 3

GENERAL DISCUSSION ON PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21, FOCUSING ON THE CROSS-SECTORAL COMPONENTS OF AGENDA 21 AND THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Draft decision submitted by the Chairman

Information for decision-making

1. The Commission, having examined the report of the Secretary-General on information for decision-making and Earthwatch (E/CN.17/1995/18), noted and welcomed the important measures taken by Governments to make information more accessible to decision makers at the national level, and calls upon national Governments to utilize this information for sustainable development at the country level. The aim of such measures includes the development of a comprehensive and coherent information programme, drawing upon public participation in data collection and assessment. In this context, developed countries are urged to utilize both bilateral and multilateral channels to facilitate access by developing countries, and countries whose economies are in transition, to sources of information relative to sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Networking Programme of the United Nations Development Programme is one model for such initiatives.

2. The Commission calls attention to the feasibility study undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme to provide access to information on sustainable development to 35 small island developing States, 1/ which was conducted in keeping with General Assembly resolution 49/122 on the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

1/ A/49/414, annex.

3. The Commission expresses its appreciation to the organizers of the six workshops that furthered understanding of the issues addressed in chapter 40 of Agenda 21, particularly the efforts related to developing a work programme on indicators of sustainable development, and it supports and encourages further work in this area as elaborated in paragraphs 7 and 8 below.

4. The Commission welcomes the contribution of non-governmental organizations to the process of generating information for decision-making, including the articulation of views from local and grass-roots levels and from major groups, and expresses its desire that these activities continue and be integrated, to the extent possible, with those of national Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations.

5. The Commission expresses appreciation for the extensive international collaboration in the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch and its responsiveness to the priorities of Agenda 21 and to user needs. It urges Governments and major groups, as well as relevant international organizations and the scientific community, to participate actively in strengthening Earthwatch as an international partnership to ensure an adequate flow of information on the global and regional environment, to support decision-making and to give early warning on the state of the environment. Special attention is drawn to the need for improved delivery of information to decision makers and to increased participation in environmental observations at the local and national levels within regional and international frameworks. In this regard, the Commission welcomes all appropriate participation in the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Programme, as described in General Assembly resolution 49/112.

6. The Commission recalls that, in addition to Earthwatch, which is a global system for environmental information, Agenda 21, in paragraph 40.13, calls for the more effective coordination also of development data, "perhaps through an equivalent and complementary 'Development Watch'". In this context, the Commission noted the cooperative effort of the organizations of the United Nations system to prepare proposals for the creation of such a Development Watch. It requests the United Nations Development Programme, with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and in cooperation with the regional commissions and other interested organizations, to further define Development Watch and, in this regard, to submit a progress report on the implementation of the programme of work for Development Watch to the Commission at its session in 1997, taking into account the need for a close linkage between Development Watch and Earthwatch.

7. The Commission noted the importance of developing, among the organizations of the United Nations system, a common or compatible system of access to their respective databases, in order to share data fully, to streamline the collection and interpretation of data and to identify data gaps, for the purpose of providing more comprehensive and integrated data to decision makers at the national, regional and international levels. The Commission invites the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development to refine measures for establishing such a common or compatible system and to report thereon to the

Commission at its fourth session. The Commission notes also the rapidly growing number of information systems for sustainable development at the national and regional levels, and invites the Secretary-General to consider ways of enhancing compatibility among and access to these systems and to report his findings to the Commission at its session in 1997.

8. Governments are encouraged to develop or conduct studies on the development of indicators of sustainable development in accordance with specific national conditions. In this context, there is a need for coordination, especially through the Commission, of the many intergovernmental and scientific institutions working in this area, as well as a need for intensive international dialogue.

9. The Commission urges bodies such as the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, the statistical services of Member States and other appropriate institutions, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Statistical Office of the European Communities and major groups to cooperate in the development of indicators of sustainable development. Furthermore, the Commission encourages the scientific community, including the project on indicators of sustainable development undertaken by the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment, to focus its efforts on the development and improvement of such indicators.

10. The Commission reiterates the importance of developing indicators of sustainable development for use by decision makers at the local, regional and national levels and expresses its appreciation to the organizations, both intergovernmental and non-governmental, and the Governments that have contributed to the process of defining a programme of work for the further development of indicators of sustainable development.

11. The Commission approves the programme of work contained in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/1995/18) and calls upon the organizations of the United Nations system, with the support of other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and through the coordination of the Department for Programme Coordination and Sustainable Development, to implement, within existing resources, the following, as outlined in the programme of work: (a) enhancement of information exchange among all interested actors; (b) development of methodology sheets to be made available to Governments; (c) training and capacity-building at the regional and national levels; (d) testing of an appropriate combination of indicators and monitoring of experiences in a few countries; (e) evaluation of the indicators, including those mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/1995/18), and adjustment, as necessary; (f) identification and assessment of linkages between the economic, social, institutional and environmental elements of sustainable development; (g) development of highly aggregated indicators; and (h) further development of the conceptual framework for sustainable development indicators, involving experts from the areas of economics, social sciences and physical sciences and policy makers, as well as incorporating non-governmental organization and indigenous views. The Commission requests the secretariat to provide it with a progress report on the implementation of the programme of work at its fourth session, in 1996.

12. The Commission took note of the report of the Statistical Commission on its twenty-eighth session, 2/ and expresses its appreciation to the Statistical Commission for its offer to collaborate with and support the Commission in its work on indicators of sustainable development. In this context, the Commission also welcomes the action taken by the Statistical Commission with respect to the international compilation of environmental indicators from national statistical services and looks forward to the contribution of this work to the overall programme of work on indicators of sustainable development. The Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development should promote and assist these efforts.

2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 8 (E/1995/28).